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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Subject: "WOOD FOR HOME FIRES." Information from wood experts of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Many of us remember how we went through World War I singing such rousing songs as "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag" and "Keep the Home Fires Burning." Once again we'll be keeping the home fires burning in more ways than one, but this time fuelwood will play the obligato, with less emphasis on coal and oil.

Now that women are taking over jobs formerly held by men, it looks as though homemakers will be helping to keep the home fires burning. For example, some of you may have already lent a hand in stacking wood to season it for fall and winter use.

Fortunately, householders can buy wood-burning stoves without priorities when merchants have them in stock. The War Production Board indicates that enough wood-burning heaters will continue to be available in any area that may be short in fuel from a lack of railroad cars or trucks to haul it.

But if you have a furnace and plan to use wood for fuel, you don't need to worry about buying a new grate. Installing a grate when wood is to be burned often interferes with efficient heating. In fact, removing the grate altogether is advisable in many furnaces to provide enough combustion space, which needs to be two-thirds greater for firing with wood. By removing the grates and using the ashpit floor as a fuel bed, it's usually possible to increase the space available for burning the large volumes of combustible gas released from wood.

Another advantage of increasing the space for wood burning is that long flames produced are less likely to go up the smoke pipe, wasting heat and possibly causing damage if the smoke pipe is small and of light material.

It's a good idea to line the ashpit with firebrick and to close any openings below the grate level with fire clay or asbestos cement. Keep the draft door at the bottom closed at all times except when you are starting the fire.

Wood has a dvantages as fuel that many people nowadays have not even considered. For one thing, it's clean and free from disagreeable dust. Also, it produces little smoke or soot when properly burned. A cord of hardwood leaves only 60 pounds of ashes, while a ton of hard coal makes from 200 to 300 pounds of ashes. Then again, wood ashes have fertilizing value. And wood begins to burn at a fairly low temperature, so a wood fire is easy to start and it can be maintained at a lower ebb than a coal fire, when only a small output of heat is needed.

Although the volume of high-grade timber is decreasing year by year, inferior and waste wood is so plentiful that there is more than enough for most fuel purposes.

You can cut cordwood without damage to your woodland if you select dead, diseased, or insect infested trees, and crooked, stunted, or "wolf trees" that take up too much space, shading healthy young growth. Straight, sound, thrifty trees should not go into fuelwood but should remain in the woods to produce lumber, poles, pulpwood, or other higher value crops.

Naturally, it's patriotic to burn fuelwood. We know that transportation facilities are hard pressed these days to supply food, clothing, and equipment to men in our armed forces, so it's up to those of us on the home front to use more wood whenever feasible and less coal and oil that has to be hauled long distances.

Some one has figured that every cord of wood cut and used for fuelwood releases about a ton of coal or 200 gallons of fuel oil for other purposes.

As for the fuel situation in general, last-minute reports indicate it may be critical in at least two sections of the United States. First, the Atlantic Seaboard including 17 states; and in Washington and Oregon. That means wood will become an important fuel not only on farms, but in smaller towns and cities as well,

especially in New England and the Pacific Northwest.

Besides being patriotic, it's often economical to burn fuelwood. A cord of hardwood such as hickory, oak, beech, birch, hard maple, ash, elm, locust, longleaf pine, or cherry gives off the same amount of heat as a ton of coal.

Green wood freshly cut from the woodland requires from six months to a year for thorough seasoning. Splitting the pieces helps. If you stack it outdoors on a hilltop where it is exposed to sun and wind, the seasoning process takes less time. Pile the sticks crisscross so the air can get to the wood easily. And here's a tip from the Forest Service. If branches of live trees felled during the summer are left with the leaves on the branches for two or three weeks, until the leaves wither, you can sometimes shorten the seasoning time as much as three months.

Another point to keep in mind is to plan ahead, in hauling fuelwood in order to save tires and gasoline. For instance, animals can often transport fuelwood short distances. In using trucks, if roads aren't well constructed, it's best to keep the trucks out of the woods as far as possible. Then there's the back haul to consider. By picking up materials and supplies of back haul, we can save wear and tear on tires and conserve gasoline. Best of all, we'll be helping to win the war!

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